

The Intelligence Process

STATINTL

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There is a popular myth that everything about CIA is so hush hush that the very initials CIA should not be mentioned. That is not true. Most of the work in CIA bears no more resemblance to cloak and dagger than does the work performed by professors in their study. In fact a large proportion of the people in CIA have been engaged in scholarly work and some intend to go back to their universities. Obviously, however, some parts of the work of this agency like that of other agencies are confidential. No one would expect the State Department to reveal the details of the negotiations, say, concerning an oil settlement in Iran, and no one expects the reports of our ambassadors to be made public immediately. There are therefore areas of the activities of CIA which I shall not discuss and when you ask questions at the end of my talk I hope you will steer clear of these areas. If you do inadvertently ask questions which relate to those parts of our work I shall merely say "No comment".

However it is important that you both as citizens and as students should know what we are trying to do. Briefly, what we are trying to provide is the background of information upon which the policy maker formulates his policy. We do not have anything to do with policy. In fact an intelligence officer who allows himself to dwell on what he would do to correct a situation, or who allows his view on correct national policy to guide his report on a situation has lost his usefulness as an intelligence officer. The questions we are concerned with are these. What are the facts in the situation? What kind of a picture do these facts suggest? What is the trend? And finally what

is our estimate of the various probable courses of action? As you can see from these questions our work is not very different from the kind of work the historian does. When the historian studies a situation and the way in which it evolved he knows how the story came out. To that extent his job is easier. We don't know how the story turned out. We study the past in order to understand the present. We study the way people have acted to understand how they probably will act in the future. We don't have any false pride about our work. Take a person in my position. I've been married for more than a quarter of a century and yet I would hesitate to say how my wife would act in every situation which may come up. My children have been around for some time and yet what they do very often surprises me, to put it mildly. Move over to bigger things. You have recently seen people trying to guess the outcome of the election in our own country. Here are people we know intimately, conditions we know intimately, and yet very few were willing to make a confident estimate of the outcome of the election. We in CIA don't believe our estimate of trends within a country or our estimate of the probable courses of action of people who rule a country are likely to be anywhere near 100% correct. However the policy maker simply must have the best information available concerning conditions, trends, and probable courses of action. All our agency can do is to produce the best possible estimate.

The need for such an intelligence agency is very new. Move back for a moment into the not too distant past. Move back say seventy-five years to the time when Germany was the strongest power in Europe and when Bismarck had undisputed control over the foreign policy of Germany. He did practically all of the thinking on the subject and to do his thinking he retired to his inaccessible estate where he spent most of his time planting trees, cutting down trees, ranging over the countryside with his huge dogs, and then sitting

down before the fire in the evening and talking with anyone who was willing to make the long and tiresome journey to see him. From time to time Bismarck would send a memorandum up to Berlin sketching the international situation as he saw it and writing down the courses of action Germany was to follow. The whole thing was prepared on the basis of occasional long hand dispatches or telegrams received from German representatives abroad, these plus Bismarck's own knowledge of the world. That knowledge was superb so far as it went. It was a knowledge of six countries and of the rulers in six capitals: Britain, France, Italy, Austria, Russia and Germany. He didn't have any very detailed knowledge of these six countries. He did have a firm grasp of the history of these countries, the national interest of each, and above all of the small ruling group in these countries. With that partial knowledge of a very small segment of the world plus his superb judgment he was able to raise Prussia from the lowest to the greatest of the continental European powers. Occasionally something would come up which suggested that this kind of knowledge might not always be sufficient. Once a colonial traveller came out to the country to see him and painted a glowing picture of what Germany could do if it controlled central Africa. Bismarck merely walked up to a map of Europe, pointed to France and Russia and to Germany between the two of them, and said "This is the only map I know and all of my thinking is confined within this map." i.e., large parts of world outside his field of vision. Somewhat later, after he had retired from office, he went on a trip to Hamburg and there he saw a great modern port with its factories, its docks, and its ships. He shook his head and turned away saying: "This is a new world, I don't understand it". i.e. knew little of great economic, technological, and scientific changes which were transforming the world. He would have found it impossible to operate as he did, in the world of the middle twentieth century. The statesman today cannot confine his attention

to a half dozen countries, and even within those countries he could not feel that he understood them if he knew the people who happened to be in office at a particular time. The policy maker in Washington today must look out over the whole world. No matter how learned he is, every now and then he hears the name of a place which he would have difficulty locating precisely on the map. No individual could hope to understand this world on the basis of what he could carry around in his head. Now American security interests are affected by unrest in black Africa, by the slashing of rubber trees in south Asia, by the discontent of Arabs, by forces which swirl from one end of this globe to another. The need for CIA thus grows out of the widening interests of the US and the complications of the modern world.

On top of all that, that third of the world which most vitally affects our interests is the hardest part of the world to know anything about, the USSR, the European Satellites and Communist China. Why the rulers in the Kremlin have let down the Iron Curtain is an interesting question in itself. So far as CIA is concerned, the Iron Curtain means that it gets harder and harder to get the essential facts about that third of the world concerning which it is most essential that we have all the facts. Just take a little detail, the Soviet Five Year Plans for the economic development of the USSR. The details of the first Five Year Plan were set forth in four volumes; the second Five Year Plan filled two volumes. We know about the third Five Year Plan through six pages given out by the USSR, and what was published on the present Five Year Plan filled three pages of the New York Times. Here you see very simply what a problem it is to get accurate information. Add on to that the slow but steady drawing in of the possibilities of travel in the USSR. Vast areas, the most important, cannot be visited at all. Even in those areas where there is least to conceal, unrestricted travel is impossible. Even casual conversations with Russians are impossible. In his great book on the study of history, To the search of

what he calls the law of challenge and response and argues that civilizations become great through their response to severe challenge. Well the Iron Curtain is certainly an unprecedented challenge to American intelligence officers and we would like to think that our intelligence agency will grow in proportion to the severity of the challenge.

It was to meet that challenge that CIA was established in 1947. Before World War II, intelligence reports came in, for instance, to the Department of State and to the Military Services from our representatives abroad. During the war an effort was made to coordinate and expand these intelligence activities through the Office of Strategic Services. The OSS was disbanded at the end of the war, but it soon became evident that the world wide interests of this country required some central clearing house for all information on developments abroad. To meet that need the CIA was established by the Congress. The statute which forms the charter of the agency laid three functions on CIA. The first was to make suggestions for the improvement of American intelligence to the National Security Council, the highest policy forming body of our government. The second function was to undertake activities of common concern. How do these two work out in practice. Take for instance the field of economics. There are economists in most of the agencies in Washington. A large proportion of these economists do at least some of their work on questions relating to foreign countries. The job of CIA is to see, in the first place, that everything needed on economic developments abroad is being studied somewhere in the government. Then it is the job of CIA to bring the work of each of these economists into contact with that of the others. It may turn out that the same job is being done in a half dozen agencies. That is obviously wasteful and suggestions must be made for the elimination of this duplication. If not done anywhere, suggest

where to be done, or do in CIA. Then a mechanism must be devised which will make it possible to bring to bear on any problem the efforts of all the economists in the government who are working on any aspect of the problem. Finally an effort must be made to bring the conclusions of all of these investigations into harmony with each other. Obviously the National Security Council would be more confused than enlightened if a half dozen agencies prepared contradictory reports on industrial developments in Communist China. Neither the President nor all of the members of the Council could be able to decide with confidence which of these reports was accurate. So it is the task of CIA to bring together the economists working on the industrial development of Communist China so that they may compare the evidence and reach conclusions which will serve to enlighten rather than confuse the National Security Council. This is a big job. Coordination is never a simple job. The economists working on a problem such as this one are likely to be fairly strong minded men and it takes some doing to bring their views into harmony. What is true of economics is true of other fields, such as science. Where there are many people working in various parts of the government there is always a danger that some valuable aspect of scientific development abroad will be overlooked and there is always the problem of getting the scientists to agree on all the facts of such development.

Finally and probably of greatest importance, the statute laid on CIA the task of coordinating intelligence relating to the national security and of disseminating these coordinated estimates within the government. What that means in practice is that where some intelligence problem is related to the security

of our country then it is the duty of CIA to bring together all of the experts on this subject throughout the government and in consultation with them produce an estimate which will form the background for policy action by the National Security Council.

As General Smith has recently said publicly, the most important of these estimates and one which must be made periodically is an estimate of the capabilities -- military, economic and political -- of the USSR, and of probable Soviet courses of action. I don't think it is necessary to elaborate on the difficulty of preparing such an estimate. What it means is -- what have they got; how do they look at the world; and what are they likely to do with what they've got. Again in order to put such an estimate in perspective look at our own government. In your mind try to sketch out what we are likely to do in international affairs in the future. None of us would be willing to make such an estimate on a categorical basis. In dealing with the Kremlin we do have some guide. These people have been in power for a long time. We know how they have acted over the last generation. That gives us some simple basis for estimating what they are likely to do in the future. Some basis but not a great deal. Before World War II, people were critical of Neville Chamberlain because they said he had not studied Hitler's Mein Kampf carefully. Well suppose he had made such a careful study. If he had, he would have found Hitler saying that in the future Germany must make an alliance with Britain and Germany must always regard Soviet Russia as the mortal enemy of Germany. How good a preparation would that knowledge have been for the events of 1939 when Hitler repeatedly rejected Britain's offers of friendship and made an alliance with Soviet Russia. What has happened is not a very good basis for estimating what will happen. The first rule of every intelligence officer is not to dig in on any position. Rather the intelligence officer must always be ready to

change his mind as new evidence appears.

On the basis of my experience in CIA I can say that I have never worked with men who are as eager to allow new facts and new points of view to change their existing estimates. Obviously we cannot lay all the facts before everyone and listen to everyone's opinion but the estimates which go to the National Security Council are based on all of the evidence available in all of the agencies in Washington. The drafts of these estimates are discussed line by line with the most competent officials in all of these agencies. There is even an effort made to get an outside check on our estimates. Obviously there is a great danger that any group of people no matter how open minded they are, who work together all the time, will fall into what you might call a "party line" on big questions concerning international conditions and how they are likely to evolve. In order to guard against this risk the agency has from time to time consulted well known people who are not in the government, who do not work together ordinarily and who are not committed to any particular position. In this way it is hoped that what you might call the occupational disease of a group of people who work together all of the time, the disease of like-mindedness, may be overcome.

Well that gives you some idea of the way we spend our time, gathering information, trying to see what kind of a picture can be made out of the information, trying to project that picture into the future and above all trying to estimate the courses of action the other governments are likely to adopt and particularly the government of the USSR. I tell you of these things because we feel it very important that the students in our universities become interested in the possibility of making a career in intelligence. (We would like you to realize that intelligence isn't a matter of false beards and cloaks and daggers). It is hard work and work worthy of the finest minds our country

produces. I don't think it necessary to belabor the point that what happens to our country will be very largely dependent on our knowledge of the rest of the world and of how the rest of the world is likely to act. From my own short experience in the agency I can say that I have never done such interesting work and that I have never worked with a finer group. It is not a work in which one can get rich. It is certainly not work in which one can become famous. But it is work which by government standards is well paid and it is work in which one's mind and energy can find full scope.

Now in conclusion let me say a few words on preparation for working in Washington. Certain one should learn all one can of foreign languages. And by learning a foreign language I don't mean the ability to pass courses. I mean learning to read and speak a language with ease. Next learn to project yourself into a foreign culture in particular that of Communist countries. Beyond that some jobs will require this or that particular subject. Everyone I should think would need at least a smattering of economics. But for work in our agency what is needed are qualities of mind rather than particular courses. Honesty, industry, and above all, judgment are the important things. For my money I would rather hire a man who had a good training in the humanities and who was a humanist in the best sense of that much abused word than a man who could show a major in international relations, but who was not a humanist. Courses in international relations have their value but they can also be dangerous if you get the idea that a major in international relations is all you need to understand international relations. The ability to think and the ability to express what you think in correct simple English are more important than a knowledge of the structure of the United Nations. Finally, as you go along to

more and more responsible positions in government you come to value what are real theological virtues in a man, qualities like humility and charity, qualities which enable you, no matter how large an area of the earth's space you are dealing with, to remember that that area is inhabited by human beings, each of whom -- no matter how depraved its rulers or its system of government -- is an individual created by God and important as one of God's creatures.

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